

Spying Non-Scandal

A minor event signaling the end of the honeymoon.

We really did not need a major spy scandal to tell us that the honeymoon with Russia was over. But the arrest of the CIA's Aldrich Ames makes the point with some finality.

There is no need to be scandalized by the Ames affair. Everyone spies. But there is a need to be sobered. Not everyone spies in the same way. That post-Soviet Russia should have continued to run the CIA's Soviet counterintelligence chief as a Russian mole helps clarify the nature of the U.S.-Russian relationship.

Yes, friendly countries do spy on each other. But our spying on Russia (and vice versa) is of a different order than, say, reading France's E-mail. And were the French to discover someone passing secrets to us, he would hardly be shot, as were some of the agents Ames allegedly betrayed to Moscow.

That is the difference between peering in on friends and spying on rivals. The Ames episode helps define Russia clearly. It is not an ally. At best, it is a potential partner, though that is many years off. For now, it is a rival with diverging interests.

But not a mortal enemy. It is important to keep that distinction in mind against the alarmists who would point to Ames and have us believe that nothing has really changed since the Cold War. Everything has changed.

The Soviet Union was a mortal enemy, unrelentingly hostile because it defined its interests as intrinsically opposed to those of the West. It held

deeply that there were two opposing camps in a world with room for only one. All conflicts were thus zero-sum (with one exception: nuclear weapons, which had the potential to destroy both camps simultaneously).

Russia today is far different. It is not ideologically hostile to the West. Properly speaking, it cannot be said to have any ideology at all. It does, however, have national interests. Some are compatible with ours, some are not.

In Central Asia, for example, where the Soviets are meddling in the civil war in Tajikistan, Russian and American interests can be said to coincide. The Russians are manning a front line against Islamic fundamentalism. Fine with us. Meddling in the Baltics and Ukraine, on the other hand, a front line of Western democracy, is not all right with us.

Dealing with Russia will require, therefore, that we grow up and adopt a nuanced view of Russian actions and intentions. Russia is a great power. It seeks a sphere of influence. Some of this seeking we do not like and will oppose. The result will be conflict.

The next major flash point is Crimea, the formerly Russian province now part of Ukraine, which late last month voted overwhelmingly for a president pledged to Crimean independence and/or reunification with Russia. Ukraine does not take kindly to its coming dismemberment, just as Russia has never taken kindly to Ukrainian independence (from Moscow).

took the West off the hook. But the relief with which the Russian entry into Sarajevo was greeted here was extraordinarily shortsighted. We were relieved of the need to carry out our threat of air strikes. But the Russians are not in Sarajevo on our behalf. They are there on behalf of the Serbs.

The Russian presence shields the Serbs from

NATO attack. We are not about to drop bombs that could kill Russians. Moreover, while a cease-fire is an immediate relief to the Bosnian Muslims, it is a strategic gain for the Bosnian Serbs. A general cease-fire in place is a Serb objective, not a Muslim one. The Serbs would very much like an armistice that leaves them with the 72 percent of Bosnia they hold today. It is the Muslims who want to fight on to regain their lost territory.

The Russians have now intervened on the ground and at the peace table on behalf of the Serbs. We have taken up the cause of the Muslims. Two great powers, two conflicting interests. With the Sarajevo ultimatum, we and the Russians enter upon a serious, potentially dangerous game of Balkan roulette.

"The period of market romanticism is now over," declared Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin upon assembling his reform-averse, apparatchik-heavy government last month. But it is not just Russia's fling with market reform that is over. The diplomatic honeymoon with the West—Russian presidential adviser Sergei Karaganov calls it "the romantic period"—is over too.

The Ames affair did not cause the honeymoon's end. It only marks the end. It is a minor event—yet another spy gone over to the other side. But it signals the truly major event playing out today in Bosnia, tomorrow in Crimea: two great powers, after a momentary embrace, going their own way.



A major conflict is brewing, possibly war, a war that would make the Bosnian conflict look tame. Our sympathies and interests lie with Ukraine. A second Crimean war, if not headed off by some compromise, threatens a serious U.S.-Russian confrontation.

The other flash point is Bosnia. Last week, things looked deceptively amicable. By getting the Serbs to acquiesce to NATO's Sarajevo ultimatum, Russia